

The Wisdom of being Religious.

A

SERMON

Preached at 17
St. PAULS.

By JOHN TILLOTSON,
Preacher to the Honourable Society of *Lincolns-Inn.*

BATEMAN Maior

*Martis quinto decimo die Martii 1663. Annoq; Caroli
secundi Angliae, &c. sexto decimo.*

IT is Ordered, That Mr. Tillotson be desired to Print his Sermon
lately Preached at St. Pauls Church before the Lord Maior and
Aldermen of this City.

W E L D.

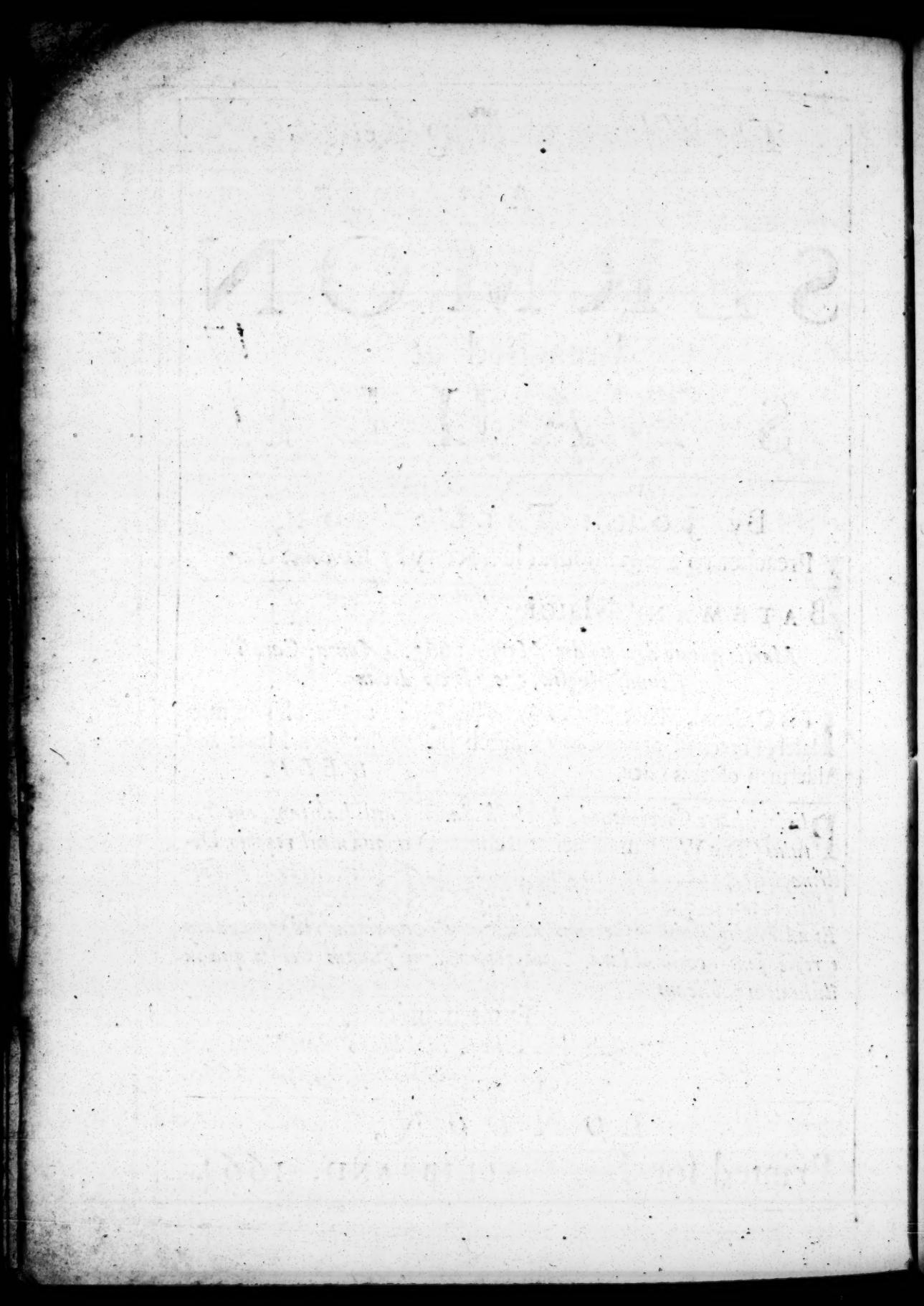
*Erlegi hanc Concionem, in Ecclesâ Sancti Pauli habitam, cui Titulus (The Wisdom of being Religious) in qua nihil reperio Doctrinæ, Discipline Ecclesiæ Anglicanae, aut bonis moribus contrarium:
Plurima tamen, quæ ad præcipuum religionis fundamentum tutandum;
Et ad Prodigiosam Atheorum hujus seculi vanitatem redarguendam
egregie sunt accommodata. Quapropter dignissimam Censo quo in
Uilitatem publicam*

Typis mandetur.

Joh. Hall, Rev. in Christo Pat. Humfredo
Episc. Lond. à sac. Domest. Maij. 13. 1664.

L O N D O N ,

Printed for S A. GELIBRAND. 1664.



To the Right Honourable
Sir A N T H O N Y B A T E M A N ,
Lord Mayor of the City of London,
and the Honourable Court of Al-
dermen there.

Right Honourable,

In obedience to your Order I here present you with a Sermon which you formerly heard. I know not how acceptable Discourses of this nature may be, I am sure they are very seasonable in this degenerate Age, in which Atheism and Profaneness are grown so impudent, and notwithstanding the restraints of Shame and Laws, do appear with so bold a face in the world. When men arrive to that degree of confidence, as to tell the world that * the Notion of a Spirit implies a contradiction, that Fear and Fancy are the Parents of a Deity, and Ignorance and Melancholy the true Causes of Devotion, and that Religion is nothing else but * the fear of an invisible power feigned by the mind, or imagined from

* Leviathan.
part. 3. c. 34.

* Leviathan.
part. 1. c. 6.

The Epistle Dedicatory.

from Tales publickly allowed ; when it shall be counted brave to defie God, and every dabbler in Natural Philosophy, or Mathematisks, or Politicks, shall set up for an Atheist ; sure then it is high time to resist this growing evil. For this purpose I have enlarged that part of the Discourse, which is more immediately levelled against Atheism , beyond what the limits of time would allow me in the Preaching of it ; and in hope that it may do some service to that end, it is now humbly offered to you by

Your Honours most humble servant

John Tillotson.

The



The Wisdom of being Religious.

J O B 28. 28.

And unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord that is Wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.



N the beginning of this Chapter Job discourses of the knowledg of Nature, and of secret and unaccountable operations of Natural Causes, and of the unsearchable perfections of the Works of God.

And enquiring at the 12th Verse, where this Wisdom is to be found, he tells us, that it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; It is not found in the land of the living; the depth saith, It is not in me, and the Sea saith, It is not in me, &c. Therefore he puts the question again, ver. 20. Whence then cometh Wisdom? and where is the place of understanding, seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living? To which he returns an answer ver. 23. God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place

thereof, for he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven to make the weight for the wind, &c. A perfect knowldg of nature is nowhere to be found but in the Author of it; no less wisdom and understanding then that which made the World, and contrived this vast and regular frame of Nature, can throughly understand the Philosophy of it, and give a perfect account of all its motions and operations. But there is a *wisdom* and *knowledg* which is very proper to man, and lies level to a humane understanding, which is suited and accommodated to the end, and uses, and necessities of man; and that is the *knowledg* of God, and of that duty, which we owe to him, the *wisdom* of pleasing God, by doing what he commands, and avoiding what he forbids: This *knowledg* and *Wisdom* may be attained by man, and is sufficient to make him happy. *And unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

Which words consist of two Propositions, which are not distinct in sense, but one and the same thing variously expressed; For *wisdom* and *understanding* are *Synonymous* words here, and though sometimes they have different notions, yet in the *Poetical books of Scripture* they are most frequently used as words equivalent, and do both of them indifferently signifie either a *speculative knowledg* of things, or a *practical skill* about them, according to the exigency of the matter or thing spoken of. And so likewise *the fear of the Lord*, and *departure from evil*, are *phrases* of a very near sense, and like importance, and

and therefore we find them several times put together in Scripture. *Prov. 3. 7. Fear the Lord and depart from evil.* *Prov. 16. 6. By the Fear of the Lord men depart from evil.* So that they differ onely as cause and effect, which by a *Metonymy* usual in all sorts of Authours, are frequently put for one another.

Now, *To fear the Lord, and to depart from evil*, are phrases which the Scripture useth in a very great latitude, to express to us *the sum of Religion, and the whole of our duty*. And because the large acception of these phrases is to be the foundation of my subsequent discourse, I shall for the further clearing of this matter endeavour to shew these two things.

1. That it is very usual in the language of Scripture, to express the *whole of Religion* by these, and such like phrases.

2. The particular fitness of these two phrases to describe Religion by.

It is very usual in the language of Scripture, to express the *Whole of Religion* by some eminent Principle or part of Religion. The great Principles of Religion are, *Knowledg, Faith, Remembrance, Love and Fear*; by all which, the Scripture useth to express the *Whole duty of man*. In the *Old Testament*, by the *Knowledg, Remembrance, and Fear of God*. Religion is called *The knowledg of the holy*, *Prov. 30.*

3. And wicked men are described to be such as *know not God*. So likewise, by the *fear of the Lord*, frequently in this book of *Job*, and in the *Psalms*, and *Proverbs*. And *Mal. 3. 16. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another*. And *Eccles. 12. 13.*

I.

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the fear of God is expressly said to be the sum of Religion; *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.* And on the contrary, the wicked are described to be such as *have not the fear of God before their eyes*, *Psal. 36.1.* And by the remembrance of God, *Eccles. 12. 11. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth:* that is, enter upon a Religious course betimes. And on the contrary, the Character of the Wicked is, that they forget God, *Psal. 9. 17. The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the Nations that forget God.* In the New Testament, Religion is usually expressed by faith in God and Christ, and the love of them. Hence it is that true Christians are so frequently called believers, and wicked and ungodly men, unbelievers. And *Rom. 8. 28.* Good men are described to be such as love God, *All things shall work together for good to them that love God.* and such as love the Lord Jesus Christ, *Ephes. 6. 24.* Now the reason why these are put for the Whole of Religion, is, because the belief, and knowledge, and remembrance, and love, and fear of God, are such powerful principles, and have so great an influence upon men to make them Religious, that where any one of these really is, all the rest, together with the true and genuine effects of them, are supposed to be. And so likewise the summe of all Religion is often expressed by some eminent part of it; which will explain the second phrase here in the Text, *Departing from evil.* The Worship of God is an eminent part of Religion; and Prayer, which is expressed by seeking God, and calling upon his Name, is a chief part of Religious worship.

ship. Hence Religion is described by seeking God, Heb. 11. 6. *He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;* and by calling upon his name, Act. 2. 21. *Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.* And so by coming to God, and by departing from evil. In this fallen state of man, Religion begins with Repentance and Conversion, the two opposite terms of which are God and sin; hence it is that Religion is described sometimes by coming to God, Heb. 11. 6. *He that cometh to God must believe that he is;* that is, No man can be religious, unless he believe there is a God. Sometimes by departing from sin, Isa. 59. 15. *And he that departeth from evil maketh himself a Prey:* that is, such was the bad state of those times the Prophet complains of, that no man could be religious, but he was in danger of being persecuted.

For the fitness of these two phrases to describe Religion by. I. For the first, *The fear of the Lord,* the fitness of this phrase will appear, if we consider that very great influence which the fear of God hath upon men to make them religious. Fear is a passion that is most deeply rooted in our natures, and flows immediately from that principle of self-preservation which God hath planted in every man. Every man desires his own preservation and happiness, and therefore hath a natural dread, and horour of every thing that can destroy his being, and endanger his happiness; Now the greatest danger is from the greatest power, and that is Omnipotency. So that the fear of God is an inward acknowledgment of a holy and just being, which is armed with an almighty

mighty and irresistible power ; God having hid in every mans conscience a secret awe and dread of his infinite Power and eternal Justice. Now Fear, being so intimate to our natures, it is the strongest bond of Laws, and the great security of our duty. There are two Bridles or restraints which God hath put upon humane nature, *Shame*, and *Fear*. *Shame* is the weaker, and hath place onely in those in whom there are some remainders of Virtue ; *Fear* is the stronger, and works upon all who love themselves, and desire their own preservation. Therefore, in this degenerate state of man-kind, *Fear* is that passion which hath the greatest power over us, and by which, God and his Laws take the surest hold ot us : Our *Desire*, and *Love*, and *Hope*, are not so apt to be wrought upon by the representation of Virtue, and the promises of Reward and Happiness as our *Fear* is from the apprehensions of Divine displeasure ; For though we have lost, in a great measure, the gust and relish of true happiness, yet we still retain a quick sense of pain and misery. So that *Fear* relies upon a natural love of our selves, and is complicated with a necessary desire of our own preservation ; therefore Religion usually makes it's first entrance into us by this passion ; and hence it is that *Solomon*, more then once, calls *the Fear of the Lord* the beginning of Wisdom. 2. As for the second phrase, *departing from evil* ; the fitness of it to express the whole duty of Man will appear, if we consider the necessary connexion that is between the negative and positive part of our duty. He that is carefull to avoid all sin, will sincerely endeavour

to perform his duty; for, the soul of man is an active principle, and busie, and will be employed one way or other, it will be doing something; if a man abstain from evil, he will do good. Now there being such a strait connexion between these, the whole of our duty may be expressed by either of them, but most fitly by departing from evil, because that is the first part of our duty: Religion begins in the forsaking of sin; *Virtus est Vitiam fugere, & Sapientia prima Stultitiam caruisse;* Virtue begins in the forsaking of Vice, and the first part of Wisdom is, not to be a Fool. And therefore the Scripture, which mentions these parts of our duty, doth constantly put departing from evil first; *Psal. 34. 14.* and *Psal 37. 27. Depart from evil, and do good. Isa. 1. 16, 17. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Isa. 55. 7. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord. Ephes 4. 23, 24.* We are first to put off the old man which is corrupt according to deceitfull lusts, and then to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and to put on the new man, &c. *1 Pet. 3. 11.* Let him eschew evil, and do good. To all which I may add this further Consideration, That the Law of God, contained in the Ten Commandments, consisting mostly of prohibitions, *Thou shalt not* do such or such a thing, our observance of them is most fitly expressed by departing from evil, which yet includes obedience likewise to the positive Precepts implied in those prohibitions.

From the words thus explained, the Proposition that I shall speak to is this, *viz.*

That

Doctr.

That Religion is the best Knowldg and Wisdom.

Or thus,

He that is truly Religious, is the most wise and knowing person.

I shall first endeavour to *confirm* the truth of this Proposition, and then make some *use* and improvement of it.

The *Confirmation* of it I shall attempt these three ways.

1. By a direct Proof of it.
2. By shewing, on the contrary, the folly and ignorance of irreligion and wickedness.
3. By vindicating Religion from those common Impurations which seem to charge it with Ignorance and Imprudence.

J.

I begin first with the direct proof of this; And because Religion comprehends two things, the *knowldg* of the *Principles* of it, and *a suitable life and practice*; (the first of which being *speculative* may more properly be called *knowldg*, and the latter, because 'tis *practical*, may be called *wisdom* or *prudence*) therefore I shall endeavour distinctly to prove these two things.

1. That Religion is the best *Knowldg*.
2. That it is the truest *Wisdom*.

First, that it is the best *Knowldg*. The *knowldg* of Religion commends its self to us upon these two accounts.

1. 'Tis the *knowldg* of those things which are in themselves most excellent.
2. Of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know.

First,

First, It is the best knowldg, because it is the knowldg of those things which are in themselves most excellent, and desireable to be known, and that is God, and our duty. God is the sum and comprehension of all perfection. It is delightful to know the Creatures, because they are some shadows of the divine perfections; There are particular excellencies scatter'd and dispers'd among the Creatures, which 'tis very pleasant to contemplate; But in God all perfections in their highest degree and exaltation meet together and are united; how much more delightful then must it needs be, to fix our minds upon such an object in which there is nothing but beauty and brightness, what is amiable, and what is excellent; what will ravish our affections, and raise our wonder, please us, and astonish us at once? And that the finite measure and capacity of our understandings is not able to take in and comprehend the infinite excellencies and perfections of God, this indeed shews the excellency of the object, but doth not at all detract from the delightfulness of the knowldg; for it is a greater pleasure for a finite understanding to be lost in the contemplation of its object, and to view unlimited excellencies, which have no shore nor bounds, then to look upon those perfections of which we can see the end and utmost; as 'tis more pleasant to the eye to have an endless prospect, then to be terminated; for this is that which properly causeth admiration, when we discover a great deal in an object which we understand to be excellent, and yet we see we know not how much more beyond that, which our un-

derstandings cannot fully reach and comprehend.

And as the knowledg of God in his *nature* and *perfections* is excellent and desireable ; so likewise to know him in those glorious manifestations of himself in the works of *Creation and Providence* ; and above all (though it be little spoken of by the Saints of the Old Testament, by reason of the obscure degree of its discovery in those times) the knowledg of God in his Son *Jesus Christ*, in that stupendious manifestation of his wisdom and mercy in the contrivance of our Recovery, which is such a mystery, and so excellent a piece of knowledg, that the *Angels desire to pry into it*, 1 Pet. 1.12.

And as the knowledg of God is excellent, so likewise of our *Duty*, which is nothing else but *virtue*, and *goodness*, and *holiness*, which are the Image of God, a conformity to the nature and will of God, and an imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections so far as we are capable : For to know our duty, is to know what it is to be like to God in *Goodness*, and *Pity*, and *Patience*, and *Clemency*, in *pardonning injuries*, and *passing by provocations*, in *justice* and *righteousness*, in *truth* and *faithfulness*, and in a hatred and detestation of the contrary of these. In a word, it is to know what is the good and acceptable will of God, what it is that he loves and delights in, and is pleased withall, and would have us to do in order to our perfection, and our happiness. It is deservedly accounted a piece of excellent knowledg, to know the *Laws of the Land*, and the *Customs of the Country* we live in, and the *Will of the Prince* we live under ; How much more to know the

the Statutes of Heaven, and the Laws of Eternity, those immutable and eternal Laws of Justice and Righteousness? to know the will and pleasure of the great Monarch, and Universal King of the World, and the Customs of that Country where we must live for ever? This made David to admire the Law of God at that strange rate he doth in the 119th Psalm, and to advance the knowledg of it above all other knowledg, *I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*

Secondly, 'Tis the knowledg of those things which are most useful and necessary for us to know. The goodness of every thing is measured by its end and use, and that's the best thing which serves the best end and purpose; and the more necessary any thing is to an end, the better it is: So that the best knowledg is that which is of greatest use and necessity to us in order to our great end, which is *Eternal happiness, and the Salvation of our Souls.* Curious speculations, and the contemplation of things that are impertinent to us, and do not concern us, nor serve to promote our happiness, are but a more specious and ingenious sort of idleness, a more pardonable and creditable kind of Ignorance. That man that doth not know those things which are of use and necessity for him to know, is but an ignorant man, whatever he may know besides; Now the knowledg of *God, and of Christ, and of our duty,* is of the greatest usefulness and necessity to us in order to our happiness: It's of absolute necessity that we should know *God and Christ, in order to our being happy:* Job. 17. 3. *This is life eternal* (that is

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the onely way to it) to know thee the onely true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ. It is necessary also in order to our happiness, to know our Duty, because 'tis necessary for us to do it, and it is impossible to do it except we know it : So that whatever other knowldg a man may be endued withal, he is but an ignorant person who doth not know God the Authour of his being, the Preserver and Protector of his life, his Sovereign, and his Judg, the giver of every good and perfect gift, his surest refuge in trouble, who can do him the most good, or the greatest harm, the present support of his life; his hopes in death, his future happiness, and his portion for ever ; Who does not know his relation to God, the duty that he owes him, and the way to please him who can make him happy or miserable for ever ; Who does not know *the things of his peace*, the way how to get his sins pardoned, and himself reconciled to an offended God ; Who doth not know the Lord Jesus Christ, who is *the way, the truth, and the life*. So that if a man by a vast and imperious mind, and a heart large as the sand upon the Sea-shore, (as it is said of Solomon) could command all the knowldg of Nature and Art, of words, and things ; could attain to a Mastery in all Languages, and found the depth of all Arts and Sciences, measure the Earth and the Heavens, and tell the Stars, and give an account of their order and motions ; could discourse of the Interest of all States, the Intrigues of all Courts, the reason of all Civil Laws and Constitutions, and give an account of the History of all ages ; could speak of Trees, from the Cedar

Cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the Hysop that springeth out of the wall, and of beasts also, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes; and yet should, in the mean time, be destitute of the knowledg of God, and Christ, and his duty; all this would be but an impertinent vanity, and a more glittering kind of Ignorance; and such a man (like the Philosopher, who whilst he was gazing upon the Stars, fell into the ditch) would but *Sapienter descendere in infernum*, be undone with all this knowledg, and with a great deal of wisdom go down to Hell.

Secondly, That to be Religious is the truest Wisdom; and that likewise upon two accounts.

1. Because it is to be wise for our selves.
2. It is to be wise as to our main interest and concernment.

First, 'Tis to be wise for our selves. There's an expression Job 22. 21. *He that is wise is profitable to himself*; and Prov. 9. 12. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thy self*; intimating, that Wisdom regards a mans own interest and advantage, and he is not a wise man that doth not take care of himself and his own concerns, according to that of old Ennius, *Ne quicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodeesse non quiret*; that man hath but an empty title of wisdom, and is not really wise, who is not wise for himself. As *Self-preservation* is the first principle of *Nature*, so care of our selves and our own interest is the first part of *Wisdom*: He that is wise in the affairs and concerns of other men, but careless and negligent of his own, that man may be said to be busie, but he is not wise; he is employed indeed,

but

but not so as a wise man should be: Now this is the *wisdom of Religion*, that it directs a man to a care of his own proper interest and concernment.

2. *It is to be wise as to our main interest.* Our chief end and highest interest is happiness; Now this is *happiness*, To be freed from all, (if it may be) however, from the greatest evils; and to enjoy (if it may be) all good, however, the chiefest. *To be happy*, is not onely to be freed from the *pains* and *diseases* of the *body*, but from *anxiety* and *vexation* of *Spirit*; not onely to enjoy the *pleasures* of *sense*, but *peace of Conscience*, and *tranquillity of mind*. *To be happy*, is not onely to be so for a little while, but as long as may be, and if it be possible, for ever. Now *Religion* designs our *greatest* and *longest happiness*; it aims at a freedom from the greatest evils, and to bring us to the possession and enjoyment of the greatest good. For *Religion* wisely considers, that men have *Immortal Spirits*, which as they are *Spirits*, are capable of a pleasure and happiness distinct from that of our *bodies* and our *senses*; and because they are *Immortal*, are capable of an everlasting happiness. Now our *Souls* being the best part of our selves, and *Eternity* being infinitely the most considerable duration; the greatest *wisdom* is to secure the interest of our *Souls*, and the interest of *Eternity*, though it be with the loss, and to the prejudice of our *temporal* and *inferior* Interests: Therefore *Religion* directs us rather to secure *inward peace*, than *outward ease*; to be more careful to avoid *everlasting* and *intolerable torments*, than *short and light afflictions* which are but for a moment; to court the *favour*

vour of God more then the friendship of the world ; and not so much to fear them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, as him who after he hath kill'd can destroy both body and soul in hell. In a word, our main Interest is to be as happy as we can, and as long as it is possible ; and if we be cast into such circumstances, that we must be miserable either in part or for a time, or else wholly and allways miserable ; the best wisdom is to choose the greatest and most lasting happiness, but the least and shortest misery : Upon this account Religion prefers those pleasures which flow from the presence of God for evermore, infinitely before the transitory pleasures of this world ; and is much more carefull to avoid eternal misery, then present sufferings. This is the Wisdom of Religion, that upon consideration of the whole, and casting up all things together, it does advise and lead us to our best Interest.

The second way of Confirmation shall be by shewing the Ignorance and Folly of Irreligion and Wickedness : And this I might do by the Rule of Contraries ; for, if he that is truly Religious be the wisest and most knowing person, then those that are irreligious and wicked are neither knowing nor wise. But because this does sufficiently appear by applying what I have said in the direct proof of this, the just contrary way, I will not enlarge upon this in the same method, but proceed upon other Heads to shew the Ignorance and Folly of such persons. Now all that are irreligious, are so upon one of these two accounts ; Either, First. Because they do not believe the Foundations and Principles of Religion, as, The Existence.

Existence of God, The Immortality of the Soul, and Future and Eternal Rewards; and of this kind there are but few, in comparison, who do not in some sort believe these things: Or else, *Secondly,* Men are *irreligious*, because though they do in some sort believe these things, yet they act contrary to their belief; and of this kind are the far greatest part of wicked men: The *first* sort are guilty of that which we call *Speculative*, the *latter* of *Practical Atheism*. I shall endeavour to discover the *Ignorance* and *Folly* of both these.

I.

Speculative Atheism, is *First*, absurd in the *Theory* and *speculation*, which argues *Ignorance*; and *Secondly*, it is an *imprudent Opinion*, both because it is against our *present interest*, and is also *unsafe* in the ultimate issue of it; which argues *Folly*.

I. It is absurd in the *Theory* and *Speculation*; and that upon these five accounts.

1. Because it gives no probable account of the *Original* of things. We see a World of Creatures, and a vast Frame of things, which we, who believe a God, attribute to God as the *Author*, (*i.e.*) to a *Being* endued with infinite *Goodness*, and *Wisdom*, and *Power*, which is a very likely Cause to produce a World: For, what more likely to communicate Being to so numerous a progeny of goodly creatures, than *infinite Goodness*? What more likely to create so vast a World, that is, to stretch forth the Heavens, and lay the foundations of the Earth, to form these, and all the Creatures in them *out of Nothing*, than *infinite Power*? What so likely to contrive all these *Creatures* each of them so perfect in their

their kind, and all of them so fitly and harmoniously suited to each other and to the whole, as *infinite Counsel* and *Wisdom*? This seems to be a reasonable account. But what account doth the *Atheist* give of this? Either he must say, that the *World was Eternal*; and that things always were as they are, without any first Cause of their Being, which is the way of the *Aristotelean Atheists*; or else he must ascribe the *Original* of the *World* to *Chance*, and the casual concourse of Matter, which is the way of the *Epicurean Atheists*. But neither of these ways gives a probable account of the Existence of things.

First, Not the *Aristotelean* way; For, though we may conceive the same thing always to have been, yet it is utterly unimaginable how there should have been *an infinite orderly succession* of things, that is, *a third, fourth, fifth, &c.* without a *first*. I say, this is utterly unimaginable; But yet I will suppose that this matter doth admit of seeming and unanswerable Demonstrations both ways, viz. both *That an eternal succession of things is possible*, and *That it is impossible*; as the Question about the infinite divisibility of Quantity doth, and indeed all Questions about any thing that is *infinite*, it being but reasonable to expect that our *finite Understandings* should be puzzled and lost about any thing that is *infinite*. Now granting this, which is the utmost any man can challenge in this Question, this Account of things from an *Eternal order and succession of Causes* comes to just nothing; For, though it be granted, that there are plausible Argu-

ments for the possibility of this, yet so long as they are counterpoised by other Arguments every whit as strong and unanswerable, they can signify nothing in the ballance of Reason, because the strength of them is wholly enervated and taken off by equal Demonstrations on the other side; and so long as their hands are thus tied, such a supposition is altogether useless, and nothing can be built upon it; For what man will allow it *probable* that there hath been an Eternal succession of things, without any Original, or *first Cause*, whilst it is an even wager, whether an Eternal succession of things be so much as *possible*? And besides all this, *Aristotle* himself (who is supposed to be the great *Patron* of this *Opinion* of the *Eternity of the World*) doth elsewhere in several places of his works, own it as one of the greatest absurdities that can be, to assert an *infinite progress of Causes*, and says, that it is *unworthy of a Philosopher* to resolve any thing this way, and that the mind of man can have no rest, nor any reasonable and satisfactory account of things be given, but by staying in some *first Cause*. But I needed not have said so much to this, because the *Modern Atheists* do generally desert this way.

Secondly, Nor the *Epicurean* way, which imputes this vast pile of the World, this regular and orderly Frame of things (which it acknowledges to have had a beginning) not to *goodness*, and *power*, and *counsel*, and *wisdom*; but to a *fortunate chance*, and *happy casualty*. Now there is nothing can be more unreasonable then obstinately to impute that to *Chance*, which doth plainly and apparently contain

in it all the Arguments and Characters of *a wise design* and *contrivance*. Was ever any considerable work, in which there was required great variety of parts, and a regular and orderly disposition of those parts, done by *Chance*? Will *Chance* fit *means* to *ends*, and that in ten thousand instances, and not fail in any one? How often might a man, after he had jumbled a set of Letters in a Bag, fling them out upon the ground before they would fall into an exact Poem, yea, or make a good Discourse in Prose? And may not a little *Book* be as easily made by *Chance*, as this great *Volume* of the World? How long might twenty thousand *blind Men*, which should be sent out from the several remote parts of *England*, wander up and down before they would all meet upon *Salisbury Plains*, and fall into *Rank* and *File* in the exact order of an *Army*? And yet this is much more easie to be imagined, than how the innumerable *blind parts* of *Matter* should *Rendezvous* themselves into a *World*. A man that sees *Henry the Seventh's Chappel* at *Westminster*, might with as good reason maintain (yea, with much better, considering the vast difference betwixt that little *Structure*, and the huge *Fabrick* of the *World*;) that it was never contrived or built by any *Man*, but that the stones did by *Chance* grow into those curious Figures into which they seem to have been cut and graven; And that *upon a time*, (as *Fables* usually begin) the *Materials* of that building, the *Stone*, *Morter*, *Timber*, *Iron*, *Lead* and *Glaſs*, happily met together, and very fortunately rang'd themselves into that delicate order in which we see them

now so close compacted, that it must be a great *Chance* that parts them again. What would the world think of a man that should advance such an *opinion* as this, and write a *Book* for it? If they would do him right, they ought to look upon him as mad with a little more reason then any man can have to say that the World was made by Chance, or that the *first Men* grew up out of the Earth as *Plants* do now. And yet they who give this account of the Original of things, assume to themselves to be the *Men of Reason*, the *great Wits* of the World; the onely *cautious* and wary persons, that hate to be imposed upon, that must have convincing evidence for every thing, and can assent to nothing without a clear Demonstration for it.

II. Because it gives no reasonable account of the *Universal Consent* of Mankind in this apprehension, *that there is a God*. That men do generally believe a God, and have done in all Ages, the present experience of the World, and the Records of former times do abundantly testify. Now how comes this persuasion to have gained so universal a possession of the mind of Man, and to have found such general entertainment in all *Nations*, even those that are most *barbarous*? If there be no such thing as God in the world, how comes it to pass that this object doth continually encounter our understandings? whence is it that we are so perpetually *haunted* with this *Apparition* of a Deity, and followed with it where-ever we go? If it be not natural to the mind of Man, but proceeds from some accidental distemper of our understandings, how comes it to be so Universal,

Universal, that no differences of age, or temper, or education, can wear it out, and set any considerable number of men free from it? Into what can we resolve this strong inclination of mankind to this error and mistake, how come all Nations to be thus seduced? It is altogether unimaginable, but that the Reason of so Universal a consent in all places and ages of the world, and among all differences of persons, should be *one* and *constant*; But no *one* and *constant* reason of this can be given, but from the nature of Mans mind and understanding, which hath this Notion of a Deity born with it, and stamped upon it; or, which is all one, is of such a frame, that in the free use and exercise of it self, it will find out God; And what more reasonable then to think, that if we be Gods Workmanship, he should set this mark of himself upon all *reasonable Creatures*, that they may know to whom they belong, and may acknowledg the *Author* of their Beings? This seems to be a credible and satisfactory account of so *Universal a consent* in this matter. But now what doth the Atheist resolve this into? He is not at one with himself what account to give of it; nor can it be expected he should; For he that will over-look the true reason of a thing, w^t ich is but *one*, may easily find *many false ones*, Error being infinite. But there are *three* which he principally relies upon, *Fear, Tradition, and Policy of State*. I shall briefly consider these.

First, He would fain make us believe that this apprehension of a God, doth spring from an *infinite jealousy* in the mind of Man, and an *endless fear* of the

the worst that may happen, according to that *Divine saying* of the Poet, (which he can never sufficiently admire) *Primus in orbe Deos fecit Timor, Fear first made Gods.* So that it is granted on both sides, that the *fear* of a *Deity* doth universally possess the minds of Men: Now the question is, whether it be more likely that the existence of a God should be the cause of this fear, or that this fear should be the cause why men imagine there is a God? If there be a God who hath impressed this image of himself upon the mind of Man, there's great reason why all men should stand in awe of him; But if there be no God, it is not easie to conceive how *fear* should create an universal confidence and assurance in men that there is one. For whence should this Fear come? it must ~~must~~ be either from *without*, from the suggestion of others, who first tell us there is such a *being*, and then our fear believes it; or else it must arise from *within*, viz. from the Nature of Man, which is apt to fancy dreadful and terrible things. If from the suggestion of others who tell us so, the question returns, who told *them* so? and will never be satisfied till the first Author of this report be found out; so that this account of *fear* resolves it self into *Tradition*, which shall be spoken to in its proper place. But if it be said, that this *fear* ariseth from *within*, from the Nature of man which is apt to imagine dreadful things, this likewise is liable to inexplicable difficulties. For, *First*, the proper *object* of *fear* is something that is *dreadful*, *that is*, something that threatens Men with harm, or danger, and that in God must either be *Power*,

Or

or *Justice*; and such an object as this, fear indeed may create: But *Goodness* and *Mercy* are essential to the Notion of a God, as well as *Power* and *Justice*; Now how should fear put men upon fancying a *Being* that is infinitely good and merciful? No man hath reason to be afraid of such a *Being*, as such. So that the Atheist must join another cause to *Fear*, viz. *Hope*, to enable men to create this imagination of a God. And what would the *Product* of these two *contrary Passions* be? The imagination of a *Being*, which we should fear would do us as much *harm*, as we could hope it would do us *good*; which would be *Quid pro Quo*, and which our Reason would oblige us to lay aside so soon as we had fancyed it, because it would signify just nothing.

But *Secondly*, Suppose fear alone could do it; how comes the mind of Man to be subject to such groundless and unreasonable fears? The *Aristotelean* Atheist will say, it always was so; But this is to affirm, and not to give any account of a thing: The *Epicurean* Atheist, if he will speak consonantly to himself, must say, that there happened in the *original* constitution of the *first* men such a contexture of *Atoms*, as doth naturally dispose men to these *panick* fears; unless he will say, that when the *first* men grew out of the earth, and afterwards broke loose from their root, finding themselves weak, and naked, and unarmed, and meeting with several fierce creatures stronger then themselves, they were put into such a fright as did a little distemper their understandings, and let loose their imaginations to endless suspicions, and unbounded jealousies, which did

did at last settle in the conceit of an invisible *Being*, infinitely powerful, and able to do them harm; and being fully possest with this apprehension. (nothing being more ordinary then for crazed persons to believe their own *fancies*) they became *Religious*, and afterwards when mankind began to be propagated in the way of *generation*, then *Religion* obliged them to instill these *principles* into their Children, that so they might make the greater impression upon them in their tender years; and this course having been continued ever since, the Notion of a God hath been kept up in the world. This is very suitable to *Epicurus* his Hypothesis of the Original of Men; but if any man think fit to say thus, I cannot think it fit to confute him.

Thirdly, Whether Men were from all eternity such timerous and fancifull Creatures, or happened to be made so in the first constitution of things; it ieems however, that this *fear* of a Deity hath a foundation in Nature; And if it be *natural*, ought we not rather to conclude, That there is some ground and reason for these *Fears*, and that Nature hath not planted them in us to no purpose, then that they are vain and groundless? There is no *Principle* that *Aristotle* (the grand Assessor of the Eternity of the World) doth more frequently inculcate then this, That *Nature doth nothing in vain*; and *Epicurus* is forced to acknowledge, (and so will every man, who attentively considers the frame of the World) That although things were made by Chance, yet they have happened as well as if the greatest Wisdom had had the ordering and contriving

ving of them ; And surely wisdom would never have planted such a vain principle as the fear of a Deity in the Nature of Man, if there had not been a God in the World.

Secondly, If *Fear* be not a sufficient account of this Universal Consent, the *Atheist* thinks it may very probably be resolved into *Universal Tradition*. But this likewise is liable to great exception ; For, whence came this Tradition ? It must begin some time, it must have its original from some body ; and it were very well worth our knowing, who that *Man* was that first raised this *Spirit* which all the Reason of mankind could never *conjure* down since ; *Where* did he live, and *when*? In what *Country*, and in what *Age* of the World? *What was his Name, or his Sons Name, that we may know him?* This the *Atheist* can give no punctual account of ; onely he imagines it not improbable, that some body long ago (no body knows when) beyond the memory of all Ages, did start such a notion in the world, and that it hath past for currant ever since. But whatever he imagine, *that* is very improbable which relies upon no stronger arguments then his own conceit : But besides, If this *Tradition* be granted so very ancient as to have been before all Books, and to be elder then any History, it may, for any thing any body can tell, have been from the beginning ; and then it is much more likely to be a Notion which was bred in the mind of *Man*, and born with him, then a *Tradition* transmitted from hand to hand through all generations ; especially if we consider how many *rude* and *barbarous Nations* there

are in the World which consent in the Opinion of a God , and yet have no certain Tradition of any thing that was done among them but two or three ages before.

Thirdly, But if neither of these be satisfactory, he hath one way more ; which although it signifie little to Men of sober and severe reason, yet it very unhappy hits the jealous and suspicious humour of the generality of men, who from the experience they have had of themselves and others, are very apt to suspect that every body, but especially their *Superiors* and *Governours*, have a design to impose upon them for their own ends. In short, it is this ; That this noise about a God is a mere *State-Engine*, and a *Politick device*, invented at first by some great *Prince*, or *Minister of State*, to keep people in awe and order. And if so, from hence (saith the Atheist) we may easily apprehend, how from such an original it might be generally propagated, and become universally *currant*, having the stamp of publick Authority upon it ; besides that, *People* have always been found easie to comply with the inclinations of their *Prince*: And from hence likewise we may see the Reason why this Notion hath continued so long; for being found by experience to be so excellent an Instrument of Government, we may be sure it would always be cherished and kept up. And now he triumphs, and thinks the business is very clear : Thus it was ; some time or other, (most probably towards the beginning of the world, (if it had a beginning) when all Mankind was under one Universal Monarch;) some great *Nebuchadnezzar* set up

up this *Image of a Deity*, and commanded *all People and Nations to fall down and worship it* : And this being found a successfull device, to awe people into obedience to Government, it hath been continued to this day, and is like to last to the end of the world. To this fine conjecture I have these four things to say : 1. That all this is meer conjecture and supposition ; he can not bring the least shaddow of proof or evidence for any one tittle of it. 2. This supposition grants the opinion of a God to conduce very much to the support of Government and order in the World, and consequently to be very beneficial to Mankind ; so that the Atheist cannot but acknowledg that it is great pity that it shou'd not be true, and that it is the common interest of Mankind, if there were but probable Arguments for it, not to admit of any slight reasons against it ; and to prosecute all those who would seduce men to Atheism, as the great *disturbers* of the world, and *pests* of humane society. 3. This supposition can have nothing of certainty in it, unless this be true ; That whoever makes a politick advantage of other mens Principles, is presumed to contrive those Principles into them ; whereas it is much more common (because more easie) for men to serve their own ends of those Principles or Opinions, which they do not put into men, but find there ; so that if the question of a God were to be decided by the probability of this Conjecture, (which the Atheist applauds himself most in) it would be concluded in the affirmative ; It being much more likely, that because Politicians *reap the advantages*

of obedience, and a more ready submission to Government, from mens believing that there is a God, that they found the minds of men *preposset* to their hands with the notion of a God, then that they *planted* it there; and that they have been such *hard Masters* as to *reap where they did not sow, and to gather where they did not strew.* Fourthly, we have as much evidence of the contrary to this *supposition* as such a thing is capable of, that it was not an *Arca-num Imperii, a Secret of Government,* to propagate the belief of a God among the people, when the Governours themselves knew it to be a cheat. For we find in the Histories of all Ages of which we have any Record's, (and of other Ages we cannot possibly judge) that Princes have not been more secure from troubles of Conscience, and the fears of Religion, and the terrors of another World, (nay, many of them more subject to these) then other men, as I could give many instances, and those no mean ones: What made *Caligula* creep under the Bed when it thunder'd? What made *Tiberius* (that great Master of the *Crafts of Government*) complain so much of the grievous *fings* and *lashies* he felt in his Conscience? What mov'd that *Great Emperour, Charles the Fifth*, to quit his King'dom, and retire into a Monastery to prepare for another World? What made *Cardinal Wolsey* (one of the greatest *Ministers of State* that ever was) to pour forth his soul in those sad words: *Had I been as diligent to please my God as I have been to please my King, he would not have forsaken me now in my gray hairs.* What reason for such Actions and Speeches,

if

if these *Great Men* had known that Religion was but a cheat? Now if such great and politick persons (as the three last of these were) knew nothing of this Secret, I think we may safely conclude, that the Notion of a God did not come from the Court, that it is not the invention of Politicians, and a juggle of State, to cozen the people into obedience. And now from all this that hath been said it seems to be very evident, that the general consent of Man kind in this apprehension *That there is a God*, must in all Reason be ascribed to some more *certain* and *universal* Cause than *Fear*, or *Tradition*, or *State Policy*, viz. to this, That God himself hath stamped this *Image* of himself upon the Mind of Man, and so woven it into the very *frame* of his *Being*, that (like *Phidias* his Picture in *Minerva's Shield*) it can never totally be defaced without the ruine of humane nature.

I do but know one *objection* that this Discourse is liable to; it is this: The Universal Consent of Man kind in the apprehension of a God is no more an Argument of the Being of a God, than the general agreement of so many Nations for so many Ages in *Polytheisme* and *Idolatry* is an Argument for these. To this I answer, 1. That the generality of the *Philosophers* and wise men of all Nations and Ages did dissent from the multitude in these things; they believed but one Supreme Deity, which, with respect to the various benefits, men received from him had several Titles bestowed upon him; and although they did servilely comply with the People in worshipping God by sensible Images and Representations,

Object.

Answ.

ons, yet it appears by their Writings that they despised this way of Worship as superstitious, and unsuitable to the Nature of God. So that *Polytheisme* and *Idolatry* are far from being able to pretend to Universal Consent from their having had the Vote of the multitude in most Nations for several Ages together; which separated from the Consent and Approbation of the Wise, signifies no more then a great many *Cyphers* would do without *Figures*.

2. The gross *Ignorance* and *Mistakes* of the *Heathen* about *God* and his *Worship* are a good Argument that there is a *God*, because they shew, That men sunk into the most degenerate condition, into the greatest blindness and darkness imaginable, do yet retain some sense and awe of a Deity; that Religion is a property of our Natures, and that the Notion of a Deity is intimate to our Understandings, and sticks close to them, because Men will rather have any *God* then *none*, and rather then want a Deity, they will worship any thing. 3. That there have been so many *false Gods* invented, is rather an Argument that there is a *true One*, then that there is none: *There* would be no *Counterfeits*; but for the sake of something that is *real*; for, though all *Pretenders* seem to be what they *really* are not, yet they *pretend* to be something that *really is*: For, to *counterfeit* is to put on the likeness and appearance of some real Excellency; *There* would be no *Braſt Money*, if there were not *good and lawfull Money*; *Bristol-stones* would not pretend to be Diamonds, if there never had been any Diamonds; Those *Idols* in *Henry the Seventh's* time (as Sir *Francis Bacon*

Bacon calls them) *Lambert Simmell*, and *Perkin Warbeck*, had never been set up, if there had not once been a real *Plantagenet* and Duke of *York*; so the *Idols* of the Heathen, though they be set up in affrone to the true God, yet they are a probable Argument that there is one.

III. Thirdly, Speculative Atheism is absurd in the Theory, because it requires more evidence for things then they are capable of. *Aristotle* hath long since well observed, how unreasonable it is to expect the same kind of *proof* and *evidence* for *every thing*, which we have for *some things*. *Mathematical* things, being of an abstracted nature, are onely capable of clear *Demonstration*; But Conclusions in *Natural Philosophy* are to be proved by a sufficient *Induction* of experiments; things of a *moral* nature, by *moral Arguments*; and *matters of Fact*, by *credible Testimony*: And though none of these be capable of strict *Demonstration*, yet we have an undoubted assurance of them, when they are proved by the best Arguments that the nature and quality of the thing will bear. No man can demonstrate to me, that there is such an *Island* in *America* as *Jamaica*; yet upon the Testimony of credible persons who have seen it, and Authors who have written of it, I am as free from all doubt concerning it, as I am from doubting of the clearest Mathematical Demonstration. So that this is to be entertained as a firm *principle* by all those who pretend to be certain of any thing at all; That when any thing is proved by as good arguments as that thing is capable of, and we have as great assurance that it is as we could possibly have, supposing it were, we ought not

not in reason to make any doubt of the existence of that thing? Now to apply this to the present Case: The being of a God is not Mathematically demonstrable, nor can it be expected it should, because one-ly Mathematical matters admit of this kind of evidence; Nor can it be proved *immediately* by *sense*, because *God* being supposed to be a pure *Spirit*, cannot be the *Object* of any *corporeal sense*. But yet we have as great assurance that there is a *God* as the nature of the thing to be proved is capable of, and as we could in reason expect to have, supposing that he were. For suppose there were such a *Being* as an *Infinite Spirit cloathed with all possible perfection*, that is, as *Good* and *Wise* and *Powerful*, &c. as can be imagined, what conceivable wayes are there whereby we should come to be assur'd that there is such a *Being*, but either by an *internal impression* of the Notion of a *God* upon our Minds, or else by such *external* and visible *Effects* as our Reason tells us must be attributed to some *Cause*, and which we cannot without great violence to our Understandings attribute to any other *Cause* but such a *Being* as we conceive *God* to be, that is, One that is infinitely *Good*, and *Wise*, and *Powerful*? Now we have this double *assurance* that there is a *God*, and greater or other then this the thing is not capable of. If *God* should assume a Body, and present himself before our eyes, this might amaze us, but could not give us any rational assurance that there is an *Infinite Spirit*; If he should work a *Miracle*, that cou d not in reason convince an *Atheist* more then the Argu-ments he already hath for it; If he were to ask a sign

in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, what could he desire God to do for his conviction more then he hath already done? Could he desire him to work a greater Miracle then to make a World? Why if God should carry him out of the limits of this World, and shew him a *new Heaven*, and a *new Earth*, springing out of nothing, he might say, that innumerable parts of Matter chanc'd just then to rally together, and to form themselves into this new World, and that God did not make it. Thus you see that we have all the rational assurance of a God that the thing is capable of, and that Atheism is absurd and unreasonable in requiring more.

IV. The Atheist is absurd, because he pretends to know that which no man can know, and to be certain of that which nobody can be certain of; that is, *That there is no God*, and (which is consequent upon this, as I shall shew afterwards) *That it is not possible there should be one*. And the Atheist must pretend to know this certainly; for it were the greatest folly in the world for a man to deny and despise God, if he be not certain that he is not. Now whoever pretends to be certain that there is no God, hath this great disadvantage; He pretends to be certain of a *pure Negative*: But of *Negatives* we have far the least certainty, and they are always *hardest*, and many times *impossible* to be proved: Indeed such *Negatives* as onely deny some particular *mode* or manner of a things existence, a man may have a certainty of them, because, when we see things to be, we may see what they are, and in what manner they do, or do not exist; *For instance*, we

may be certain that Man is not a creature that hath Wings, because this onely concerns the manner of his existence; and we seeing what he is, may certainly know that he is not so or so. But *pure Negatives*, that is, such as absolutely deny the existence of things, or the possibility of their existence can never be proved; for after all that can be said against a thing, this will still be true, That many things possibly are which we know not of, and that many more things may be then are; and if so, after all our arguments against a thing, it will be uacertain whether it be or not; and this is universally true, unless the thing denied to be do plainly imply a contradiction, from which I shall afterwards shew the Notion of a God to be free. Now the Atheist pretends to be certain of a *pure Negative, viz.* That there is no such Being as God, and that it is not possible there should be; But no man can reaſonably pretend to know thus much, but he must pretend to know all things that are, or can be; which if any man should be so *vain* as to pretend to, yet it is to be hoped, that no body would be so *weak* as to believe him.

V. *Speculative Atheism* is absurd, because it is *self-contradictious*. There are these two great contradictions in the denial of a God. 1. He that denies a God, says that that is *impossible* which he must grant to be *possible*. He says it is *impossible* that there should be such a *Being* as God, in saying that *de facto* there is no such *Being*; for *Eternity* being essential to the Notion of a God, if there be not a God already, it is *impossible* now that there should be

be one; because such a *Being* as is supposed to be essentially *Eternal* and *without beginning*, cannot *now begin to be*. And yet he must grant it *possible* that there should be such a *Being*; because it is *possible* there should be such a *Being as hath all possible perfection*; and such a *Being* as this is that which we call *God*, and is that very thing which the Atheist denies, and others affirm to be; for he that denies a *God*, must deny such a *Being* as all the world describe *God* to be, and this is the general Notion which all men have of *God*, *That he is a Being as perfect as is possible*; that is, endued with all such perfections as do not imply a contradiction, as none of those perfections which we attribute to *God* do; *Not necessity of being, and self existence, and eternity, and immensity or unlimitedness*; these the Atheist must grant *possible* and *free from contradiction*, because he ascribes them to the *World*, or at least to *Matter*; *Not Goodness, or Wisdom, or Power, or Truth, or Justice*, because he ascribes these to *Men*; Nor consequently the utmost degrees of these that are possible; nor, lastly, doth *immateriality* or the Notion of a *Spirit* imply a contradiction, because the Atheist must either grant that there is a *Spirit* in *Man*, that is, something that is not *Matter*, (and consequently that an *immaterial principle* is not *impossible*) or else give a fair and satisfactory account how *meer Matter* can *think* and *understand*, and how that which moves by *certain and necessary Lawes*, that is, cannot move unless it be moved by another, and cannot but move if it be impell'd by another, is capable of *Liberty* and *Freedom*; which I think is impossible to be done.

Secondly, Another contradiction which attends the denial of a God, is this ; Atheism denies such a Being to be, as doth in the *essential Notion* of it include *necessary existence*, that is, an impossibility of not being ; And this in plain English, is to deny that thing to be, which cannot but be. Now that the *Notion* of a *God* doth essentially include in it *necessary existence*, appears from the general Notion that all men have of *God*, viz. that he is a Being that hath all possible perfection ; But that *necessary existence* is a *perfection*, is evident, because if *Being* be good, it is better to have it *necessarily*, then *contingently* ; to have it secur'd, then to be in danger of losing it : And that it is a *possible perfection*, the Atheist cannot deny, because he ascribes it to Matter, as I shewed before. So that *Atheism* doth finally resolve into these two gross Contradictions, viz. *That it is impossible that there should be such a Being as hath all possible perfections* ; that is, *That that which may be, cannot be* ; And, *That such a Being as necessarily exists, doth not, nor can possibly exist* ; that is to say, *That a thing which cannot but be, is not, nor can be*.

II. *Atheism*, as it is an *absurd*, so it is an *imprudent* Opinion ; and that upon these two accounts.

First, It is against mens present Interest. Did but Men consider what *God* is, they would see him to be so *lovely* a Being, and so full of *goodness* and all *desirable* perfections, that even those very persons, who are of such irregular Understandings as not to believe that there is a *God*, yet could not (if they understood themselves) refrain from wishing that there

there were one. For, is it not every mans interest that there should be such a Being in the World as takes particular care of him, and loves him, and is able and willing to do him good, and to make him happy; to supply all his wants, and to relieve him in all his straits, when no body else can; to preserve him in the greatest dangers, and assist him against his greatest enemies, and secure him from misery and destruction? Is it not every mans interest that there should be such a Being in the World, as would govern us for our advantage, and require nothing of us, but what is highly for our interest, and what (if we rightly understood our own concernment) we our selves would choose to do? And God is such a Being, if he be at all. Now why should any man be aggrieved that there is such a Being as this, or count it his interest to shut *Him* out of the World? I dare say, if a wise and considerate man were left to himself and his own choice, to wish the greatest good to himself he could devise; the sum of all his wishes would be, that there were just such a *Being as God is*; nor would he choose any other *Bene-factor, or Friend, or Protector for himself, or Governor for the whole World*, then *infinite Power conducted and managed by infinite Wisdom, and Goodness, and Justice*, which is the true *Notion of a God*. I confess, it is not a wicked Man's interest, if he resolve to continue such, that there should be a God; But it is not mens interest to be wicked: It is for the general good of humane society, and consequently, of particular persons, to be *true and just*; it is for mens health to be *temperate*; and so I could instance in /

in all other vertues. But this is the Mystery of Atheisme, men are wedded to their lusts, and resolv'd upon a wicked course, and so it becomes their interest to wish there were no God, and to believe so if they can; whereas if men were minded to live righteously and soberly and virtuously in the world, *to believe a God* would be no hinderance or prejudice to any such design, but very much for the advancement and furtherance of it. Men that are *good* and *virtuous* do easily believe a God; so that it is vehemently to be suspected, that nothing but the strength of mens lusts, and the power of vicious inclinations, do sway their minds, and set a *bypass* upon their Understandings towards Atheisme.

Secondly, Atheisme is *imprudent*, because it is unsafe in the issue. The Atheist layes a *Wager* against the Religious man, that there is no God, but upon strange inequality and odds; for he ventures his Eternal Interest: whereas the *other* ventures onely the loss of his Lusts, (which it is much better for him to be without) or at the utmost, of some temporal convenience; and all this while is inwardly more contented and happy, and usually more healthfull, and perhaps meets with more respect, and faithfuller friends, and lives in a more secure and flourishing condition, and freer from the evils and punishments of this world, then the Atheistical person does, (however, it is not much that he ventures;) And after this life, if there be no God, is as well as he; but if there be a God, is infinitely better, even as much as unspeakable and eternal happiness is better then extreme and endless misery. So that

that if the Arguments for and *against* a God were equal, and it were an even *Question* Whether there were one or not, yet the hazard and danger is so infinitely unequal, that in point of prudence and interest every man were obliged to incline to the Affirmative; and what-ever doubts he might have about it, to choose the safest side of the *Question*, and to make *that the Hypothesis* to live by. For, he that acts wisely, and is a throughly prudent man, will be provided *in omnem eventum*, will take care to secure the *main chance*, what-ever happens: but the Atheist, in case things should fall out contrary to his belief and expectation, he hath made no provision for this case; if, contrary to his confidence, it should prove in the Issue that there is a God, the *man* is lost and undone for ever; If the Atheist when he dies shall find that his soul remains after his body, and has onely quitted it's lodging, how will this man be amazed and blank'd, when, contrary to his expectation, he shall find himself in a new and strange place, amidst a world of Spirits, entred upon an everlasting and unchangeable state? How sadly will the *man* be disappointed when he finds all things otherwise then he had stated and determined them in this world? When he comes to appear before that God whom he hath denied, and against whom he hath spoken as despightful things as he could? Who can imagine the pale and guilty looks of this man, and how he will shiver and tremble *for the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty?* How will he be surprized with terrors on every side, to find himself thus unexpectedly and irrecoverably

recoverably plunged into a state of ruine and desperation? And thus things may happen for all this man's confidence now: For our belief or dis-belief of a thing does not alter the nature of the thing; we cannot fancy things into being, or make them vanish into nothing by the stubborn confidence of our imaginations; things are as fullen as we are, and will be what they are, what-ever we think of them; and if there be a God, a man cannot by an obstinate dis-belief of him make him cease to be, any more then a man can put out the Sun by winking.

And thus I have as briefly and clearly as I could endeavour'd to shew the *ignorance* and *folly* of *Speculative Atheism* in denying the *existence of God*. And now it will be needless to speak of the other two *Principles of Religion*, the *Immortality of the Soul*, and *future Rewards*; For no man can have any reasonable scruple about *these*, who believes that there is a God; because no man that owns the *existence* of an *infinite Spirit*, can doubt of the *possibility* of a *finite Spirit*, that is, such a thing as is *immaterial*, and does not contain any principle of *self-corruption* in it self; And no man that believes the goodness of God, can doubt but that he hath made some things as good as may be, and for as long continuance as they are capable of. Nor can any man that acknowledgeth the *holiness* and *justice* of God, and that he loves *righteousnes*, and hates *iniquity*, and that he is *Magistrate* and *Governoar* of the *World*, and consequently concerned to countenance *obedience* to, and punish the violation of his *Laws*; and withal consider-

siders the promiscuous dispensations of Gods Providence in this World, and that all things do generally happen alike to all, think it unreasonable to conclude, that after this life good men shall be rewarded, and sinners punished.

And now I think I may with reason intreat such as are Atheistically inclined, to consider these things seriously and impartially; And if there be weight in these Considerations which I have offered to them to sway reasonable men, I would beg of them, that they would not suffer themselves to be byassed by preju dice, or passion, or the interest of any lust or worldly advantage, to a contrary perswasion.

First, I would intreat them seriously and diligently to consider these things, because they are of so great moment and concernment to every man; If any thing in the world deserve our serious study and consideration, these Principles of Religion do; For what can import us more to be satisfied in, than whether there be a God, or not? whether our Souls shall perish with our Bodies, or be immortal, and shall continue for ever! And if so, Whether in that eternal state which remains for men after this Life, they shall not be happy or miserable for ever, according as they have demeaned themselves in this world? If these things be so, they are of infinite consequence to us; and therefore it highly concerns us to enquire diligently about them, and to satisfie our minds concerning them one way or other. For these are not matters to be slightly and superficially thought upon, much less (as the way of Atheistical men is) to be played and jested withal. There is no greater

argument of a light and inconsiderate person, then profanely to scoff at Religion; It is a sign that that man hath no regard to himself, and that he is not touched with a sense of his own interest; He jests with edg'd tools, and plays with Life and Death, and makes nothing of his Soul. He is the very mad-man that Solomon speaks of, *Prov. 26. 18. Who casteth fire-brands, arrows and death, and saith, Am I not in sport?* To examine severely, and debate seriously the Principles of Religion, is a thing worthy of a Wise man; But if any man shall turn Religion into Raillery, and confuse it by two or three bold jests, this man doth not so much render Religion, but himself ridiculous in the opinion of all considerate men, because he sports with his own Life. If the principles of Religion were doubtful and uncertain, yet they concern us so neerly, that we ought to be serious in the examination of them; and though they were never so clear and evident, yet they may be made ridiculous by vain and frothy men; as the gravest and wisest Personage in the World may be abused by being put into a *Fools Coat*, and the most noble and excellent Poem may be debased and made vile by being turned into *Burlesque*. So that it concerns every man that would not trifle away his Soul, and fool himself into irrecoverable misery, with the greatest seriousness to enquire into these mattets whether they be so or not, and patiently to consider the arguments which are brought for them; Many have miscarried about these things, not because there is not reason and evidence enough for them, but because they have not had patience enough to consider them.

Secondly,

Secondly, Consider these things impartially. All wicked men are of a Party against Religion; Some Lust or Interest engageth them against it. Hence it comes to pass that they are apt to slight the strongest Arguments that can be brought for it, and to cry up very weak ones against it. Men do generally and without difficulty assent to Mathematical Truths, because it is no bodies interest to deny them; but men are slow to believe Moral and Divine Truths, because the Lusts and Interests of men do prejudice them against them. And therefore you may observe, That the more virtuously any man lives, and the less he is enslaved to any Lust, the more ready he is to entertain the Principles of Religion.

Therefore, when you are examining these matters, do not take into consideration any sensual or worldly Interest, but deal clearly and impartially with your selves; Let not temporal and little advantages sway you against a greater and more durable interest. Think thus with your selves; That you have not the making of things true or false, but that the truth and existence of things is already fix'd and settled, and that the Principles of Religion are already either determinately true or false, before you think of them: Either there is a God, or there is not; either your Souls are Immortal, or they are not; one of these is certain and necessary; and they are not now to be altered; The truth of things will not comply with your conceits, and bend it self to your interests. Therefore do not think what you would have to be, but consider impartially what is, and (if it be) will be whether you will or no. Do

not reason thus; I would fain be wicked, and therefore it is my interest that there should be no God, nor no life after this, and therefore I will endeavour to prove that there is no such thing, and will shew all the favour I can to that side of the *Question*; I will bend my understanding and wit to strengthen the Negative, and will study to make it as true as I can. This is fond, because it is the way to cheat thy self; and that thou mayest do, if thou likest it: We may cozen our selves as often as we please, but *Res nolunt decipi*, *The nature of things will not be imposed upon*. If then thou be as wise as thou oughtest to be, thou wilt reason thus with thy self; My highest interest is *not to be deceived* about these matters, therefore setting aside all other considerations, I will endeavour to know the truth, and yield to that.

II.

Secondly, The *Practical Atheist*, who is wicked and irreligious notwithstanding he does in some sort believe that there is a God, and a future state; he is likewise guilty of prodigious Folly: The *Principle* of the *Speculative Atheist* argues more Ignorance, but the *Practice* of the other argues greater Folly. Not to believe a God, and another Life, for which there is so much evidence of Reason, is great ignorance and folly; but 'tis the highest madness, when a man does believe these things, to live as if he did not believe them: When a man does not doubt but that there is a God, and according as he demeans himself towards him, he will make him happy or miserable for ever; yet to live so as if he were certain of the contrary, and as no man in Reason

son can live, but he that is well assured there is no God. It was a shrewd saying of the old Monk, That two kind of Prisons would serve for all offenders in the World, an *Inquisition*, and a *Bedlam*; If any man should deny the Being of a God, and the Immortality of the Soul, such a one should be put into the first of these, the *Inquisition*, as being a desperate *Heretick*; if any man should profess to believe these, and allow himself in any known wickedness, such a one should be put into *Bedlam*; because there cannot be a greater folly and madness, then for a man in matters of greatest moment and concernment to act against his best Reason and Understanding, and by his *Life* to contradict his *Belief*; such a man does *Vivus vidensque perire*, perishes with his eyes open, and knowingly undoes himself; he runs upon the greatest dangers which he clearly sees to be before him, and precipitates himself into those evils which he professes to believe are real and intolerable; and wilfully neglects the obtaining of that unspeakable good and happiness which he is perswaded is certain and attainable. But of this more in the *Application* of this *Doctrine*.

The *Third* way of *Confirmation* shall be by endeavouring to vindicate Religion from those common *Imputations* which seem to charge it with *Ignorance* or *Imprudence*. The profane Wits of the world charge Religion with these three *Imputations*,

1. Of *Credulity*.
2. Of *Singularity*.
3. Of *Making a foolish Bargain*.

III.

First,

First, Credulity: Say they, The Foundation of Religion is the belief of those things for which we have no sufficient Reason, and consequently, of which we can have no good assurance; as the belief of a God, and of a future state after this life; things which we never saw, nor did experience, nor ever spoke with any body that did; now it seems to argue too great a facility and easiness of belief, to assent to any thing upon insufficient grounds.

To this I answer,

1. That if there be such a Being as a God, and such a thing as a future state, it cannot (as I said before) in reason be expected that we should have the evidence of sense for such things: For, he that believes a God, believes such a Being as hath all perfections, among which this is one, that he is a Spirit, and consequently, invisible, and cannot be seen: He that believes another Life after this, professeth to believe a state of which in this life we can have no trial and experience.

2. We have the best Evidence for these things which they are capable of.

3. Those who deny these Principles must be much more *credulous*, (that is) believe things upon incomparably less evidence of Reason. The *Atheist* looks upon all that are Religious as a *Company of credulous Fools well met*; But he, for his part, pretends to be wiser then to believe any thing for Company; he cannot entertain things upon those slight grounds which move other men; if you would win his assent to any thing, you must give him a clear Demonstration for it. Now there's no way

to

to deal with this *Man of Reason*, this rigid exactor of Demonstration for things which are not capable of it, but by shewing him that he is an hundred times more credulous ; that he begs more Principles, takes more things for granted without offering to prove them, and assents to more strange Conclusions upon weaker grounds, than those whom he so much accuseth of *Credulity*. And to evidence this, I shall briefly give you an account of the Atheists *Creed*, and present you with a Catalogue of the *Fundamental Articles* of his Faith, or rather *Unbelief*. *He believes*, That there is no God, nor possibly can be, and consequently that the *wise* as well as *unwise*, of all ages have been mistaken, except himself and a few more. *He believes*, that either all the world have been frightened with an *apparition* of their own *Fancy*, or that they have most unnaturally conspired together to cozen themselves ; Or that this Notion of a God is a *Trick of Policy*, though the greatest *Princes* and *Politicians* do not at this day know so much, nor have done time out of mind : *He believes*, either, that the Heavens and the Earth and all things in them had no original Cause of their Being, or else that they were made by Chance, and happened he knows not how to be as they are ; and that in this last shuffling of Matter, all things have by great good Fortune fallen out as happily, and as regularly, as if the greatest Wisdom had contrived them ; but yet he believes that there was no Wisdom in the contrivance of them. *He Believes*, That that which is possible is impossible, and that that is not, which cannot but be. *He believes*, That *meer* Matter

Matter can *Understand* and *Will*, and most dextrously perform all those *fine* and *free operations* which the Ignorant attribute to Spirits, and consequently that there are no such things as *immortal Spirits*, or a *Resurrection of the Body*, or *everlasting Life*. This is his *Creed*. And seriously it is a wonder that there should be found any person pretending to *Reason* or *Wit*, that can say *Amen* to such a heap of absurdities, which are so gross and palpable, that they may be felt. So that I think it will fall to the Atheists share to be the most credulous person; that is, to believe things upon the slightest Reasons.

II.

The Second Imputation is *Singularity*; the affectation whereof is unbecoming a Wise man: To this charge I answer.

1. If by *Religion* be meant the *belief* of the *principles* of Religion, that there is a God, and a Providence, that our Souls are Immortal, and that there are Rewards to be expected after this life; these are so far from being *singular* Opinions, that they are the *general Opinion* of Man-kind, even of the most *Barbarous Nations*: as *Tully*, *Seneca*, and others testify; insomuch, that the Histories of ancient times do not furnish us with the names of above *three or four* at most who denied a God; And *Lucretius* acknowledgeth, that *Epicurus* was the first who did oppose those great *Foundations* of Religion the *Providence* of God, and the *Immortality* of the Soul. *Primum Grajus homo, &c.* meaning *Epicurus*.

2. If by *Religion* be meant a *living up* to those *Principles*, (that is) to act conformably to our best Reason and understanding, and to *live* as it does become

become those who do believe a God, and a future State ; this is acknowledged even by those who live otherwise, to be the part of every wise man, and the contrary to be the very *madness of folly*, and height of distraction : Nothing is more ordinary then for men who live wickedly, to acknowledg that they ought to do otherwise.

3. Though according to the common course and practice of the World it be somewhat *singular* for men *truly* and *throughly* to *live up* to the *Principles* of their *Religion* ; yet *singularity* in this matter is so far from being a *Reflection* upon any mans prudence, that it is a *singular commendation* of it. In two Cases *singularity* is very commendable.

1. When there is a necessity of it in order to a mans greatest *Interest* and *happiness*. I think it to be a reasonable account for any man to give, why he does not *live* as the greatest part of the world do, that he has no mind to *die* as they do, and to perish with them ; he is not disposed to be a fool, and to be miserable for company ; he has no inclination to have his last end like theirs who *know not God*, and *obey not the Gospel of his Son*, and shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

2. It is very commendable to be *singular* in any *Excellency*, and I have shewn that *Religion* is the greatest *Excellency* : to be *singular* in any thing that is *wise*, and *worthy*, and *excellent*, is not a *disparagement*, but a *praise* : every man would choose to be thus *singular*.

The Third Imputation is, that *Religion* is a foolish bargain ;

bargain; because they who are *Religious* hazard the parting with a *present* and *certain happiness* for that which is *future* and *uncertain*. To this I answer,

1. Let it be granted, that the *Assurance* which we have of future *Rewards* falls short of the *Evidence of sense*; for I doubt not but that that saying of our *Saviour*, *Blessed is he who hath believed and not seen*; and those *expressions* of the *Apostle*, *We walk by faith and not by sight*; and *faith is the evidence of things not seen*; are intended by way of *abatement* and *diminution* to the *Evidence of Faith*, and do signify, that the *report* and *testimony* of others, is not so great *evidence* as that of *our own senses*: And though we have sufficient assurance of another state, yet not so great evidence as if we our selves had been in the other *World*, and seen how all things are there.

2. We have *sufficient assurance* of these things, and such as may beget in us a well grounded confidence, and free us from all doubts of the contrary, and perswade a reasonable man to venture his greatest *Interests* in *this World* upon the security that we have of *another World*: for

1. We have as much *assurance* of these things as things *future* and at a distance are capable of; and he is a very unreasonable man that would desire more: *Future* and *invisible* things are not capable of the *Evidence of sense*; but we have the greatest *rational Evidence* for them; and in this every reasonable man ought to acquiesce.

2. We have as much as is *abundantly sufficient* to justify every mans discretion, who for the *great and eternal*

eternal things of another World, hazards or parts with the poor and transitory things of this Life. And for the clearing of this, it will be worth our considering, that the greatest affairs of this world, and the most important concernments of this life, are all conducted onely by *Moral Demonstrations*: Men every day venture their *lives* and *estates* onely upon *Moral assurance*. For instance, Men who never were at the *East* or *West Indies*, or in *Turky*, or *Spain*; yet do venture their whole Estates in Traffick thither, though they have no *Mathematical demonstration*, onely *Moral assurance* that there are such *Places*. Nay which is more, Men every day eat and drink, though I think no man can demonstrate out of *Eucleide* or *Apollonius*, that his *Baker*, or *Brewer*, or *Cook*, have not conveyed *Poyson* into their meat or drink; And that Man that would be so *wise* and *cautious* as not to eat or drink till he could *demonstrate* this to himself, I know no other remedy for him, but that in great gravity and wisdom he must die for fear of death. And for any man to urge, that though men in temporal affairs proceed upon moral assurance, yet there is greater assurance required to make men seek Heaven and avoid Hell, seems to me to be highly unreasonable; for such an assurance of things as will make men circumspect and carefull to avoid a lesser danger, ought in all reason to awaken men much more to the avoiding of a greater: such an assurance as will sharpen mens desires, and quicken their endeavours for the obtaining of a lesser good, ought in all reason to animate men more powerfully, and to inspire them with a greater vi-

gour and industry in the pursuit of that which is infinitely greater: For why the same assurance should not operate as well in a great danger as in a less, in a great good as in a small and inconsiderable one, I can see no reason, unless men will say, that the greatness of an evil and danger is an encouragement to men to run upon it, and that the greatness of any good and happiness ought in reason to dishearten men from the pursuit of it.

Use I.

The *Use* that I shall make of this, shall be

1. To put men out of conceit with *Sin*.
2. To perswade men to be *truly Religious*.

First, If Religion be the best Knowledg and Wisdom, this challenges wicked men for their folly and ignorance; this conviction of the great imprudence and unreasonableness of a wicked course should shame men out of Irreligion. Wicked men are in Scripture described by this *Character*, they are those that *know not God*; which argues monstrous ignorance and stupidity; for to have an understanding, and not to know God, is in intellectual things just such an absurdity, as it is in natural things to have eyes, and not to discern the light; for as light is *primum visibile*, the first object of our sight, so God is *primum intelligibile*, the plainest and most obvious object of our understandings; *He fills Heaven and Earth*, every thing represents him to us; which way soever we turn our selves, we are encountred with clear evidences and demonstrations of a Deity; *For the invisible things of him from the Creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things*

things made, even his eternal Power and God-head. So that men are without excuse, as the Apostle speaks. Rom. I. 20. Ἐις τὸν ἀνθρώποντας such men as know not God can have no *Apology* to make for themselves; their ignorance is utterly inexcusable: Or if men do understand, or believe there is such a Being as God; not to consider this, not to attend to the proper *consequences* of such a *principle*; not to know our Relation to him, and dependance upon him, and obnoxiousness to his Power and Justice in case we neglect, contemn, and disobey him: not to know the duty that we owe to him who hath made us, and hath an unquestionable right in us, and title to us, and authority over us; and is therefore our supremam *Law giver*, because he hath power to make us happy or miserable for ever, *to save or to destroy us*; and consequently that it is our highest interest to please him, to know his Will and to do it; This is gross ignorance, and inconsiderateness, and stupidity as can be imagined.

He that observes the lives and actions of the greatest part of men, would verily think that they understood nothing of all this; therefore we find in Scripture that when God looks down upon the wickedness of men, he pronounces them to be without understanding, Deut. 32. 28. when God had reckoned up the rebellions and perverseness of the Children of Israel, he concludes, *It is a nation void of counsel. neither is there any understanding in them.* In the 14 Psalm at the beginning, the Psalmist represents God as looking down from heaven upon the children of men; and when he saw how they had

had corrupted themselves, and what abominable works they did, crying out, *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?* Not that wicked men are destitute of the *natural faculty* of Understanding, but they have it as if they had it not; they *have Understandings*, but they do not *use them*, which in effect, and by interpretation, is all one as if they had none; Nay, happy were it for them if they had them not, for then they would not be liable to the Judgment of God, nor accountable to Him as reasonable creatures; but this ignorance is wilfull and affected; men are not *blind*, but they *wink*, and shut their *eyes*; they *can understand*, and *will not*; or if they do understand any thing, they imprison the *Truths of God*, and *detain them in unrighteousness*; they thrust light into a dungeon, and hide the candle of the Lord that is in them *under a bushel*, they do not suffer those things that they know to have a due power and influence upon their hearts and lives: And this is an Ignorance that will be so far from *excusing* men, that it will *aggravate* their condemnation; and therefore *Irreligion* is not onely an argument of the greatest *Ignorance*, but of the greatest *Folly*. I know there are great pretensions in the world to Knowledge and Wisdom, but upon a true and just account of things, there's nothing more familiar and ordinary then Ignorance and Folly; these ill weeds are of a forward and plentifull growth in the nature of man; *Nihil tam valde vulgare quam nihil sapere*, Nothing is more common then for men not to be wise. We talk much of *Prodigies*, but, as *Tully* sayes well, *Maximus*

mum portentum est vir sapiens, One of the greatest Wonders in the World is a truly wise and knowing person; so that it is not very easie to answer Job's Question at the 12th. Verse of this Chapter, *Where shall Wisdom be found? and where is the place of Understanding?* So many wicked men as there are in the world, so many *Fools*, and that I am afraid amounts to a great number. Men generally stand upon the credit and reputation of their Understandings, and of all things hate to be accounted Fools, because Folly is so great a reproach to the Understanding of a man, and so high a reflexion upon his discretion: But I know no way for men to avoid this imputation, and to bring off the credit of their Understandings, but by being truly Religious, by fearing God, and departing from evil: For certainly, there is no such imprudent person as he that neglects God and his Soul, and is careless and slothfull about his everlasting concerns, because this man acts contrary to his truest Reason and best Interest; he neglects his own safety, and is active to procure his own ruine: He flies from happiness, and runs away from it as fast as he can; and pursues misery, and makes haste to be undone. Hence it is that *Solomon* does all along in the *Proverbs* give the title of *Fool* to a wicked man, as if it were his proper name, and the fittest character for him, because he is eminently such; There is no such fool as the sinning fool, who every time he sins ventures his Soul, and layes his everlasting Interest at the stake; every time a man provokes God, he does the greatest mischief to himself that can be imagined.

gined. A mad man that cuts himself, and tears his own flesh, and dashes his head against the stones does not act so unreasonably as a sinner, because he is not so sensible of what he does; wickedness is a kind of *voluntary* frenzy, and a *chosen* distraction, and every sinner does wilder and more extravagant things, than any man can do that is craz'd and beside himself, and out of his witts; onely with this sad difference, that he knows better what he does. And that wicked men are many of them wise as to the things of this world, is no vindication of them any more, than the more innocent actions of mad men, (as catching at shadows, and pursuing butter-flies) about which possibly they may use as great an activity and diligence, as any man can do about the most weighty affairs; but this does not vindicate them from being mad, for because such actions are trifling and impertinent to the great concernments of life, we account such men distracted for all that. I know the world applaud themselves much in this wisdom, and cry it up as the onely prudence; but infinite wisdom which is the best judg of wisdom, calls it folly. *David*, in *Psal. 2.* when he brings in the *Sages* and *Politicians* of the world, consulting about a wicked design against *Christ*, he tells us, that as wise as they took themselves to be, *He that sits in heaven laughs at them, and the Lord hath them in derision*; and shall we account them wise at whom *God laughs*? can we reckon that to be prudence which the *Lord hath in derision*? The Rich man, *Luk. 12.* who had *enlarged his barns, and laid up goods for many years*, no doubt took himself for a very

very prudent man; but God who calls things as they are, and does not call any body out of his name, calls this man *fool*, because in the midst of all this care, he had neglected his soul, *Thou fool, &c.* To them who believe another life after this, an eternal state of happiness or misery in an other world, (which is but a reasonable *Postulatum*, or demand among *Christians*) there is nothing in *Mathematicks* more demonstrable then the folly of wicked men; for it is not a clearer and more evident principle, that the whole is greater then a part, then that *Eternity* and the concernments of it are to be preferred before *Time*.

But it is not my work to revile sinners, and to call them names, but to convince them if it be possible, and to reclaim them. I will therefore put the matter into a *temporal Case*, that wicked men who understand any thing of the Rules and Principles of worldly wisdom, may see the imprudence of a sinful course, and be convinced that this their way is their folly, even themselves being judges.

Let me then propound some *Cases* to sinners, and ask them a few *Questions*. Is that man wise, as to his *body* and his *health*, who onely cloaths his hands, but leaves his whole body naked? who provides onely against the *Tooth-ach*, and neglects whole troops of mortal diseases that are ready to rush in upon him? just thus does he who takes care onely for this vile body, but neglects his precious and immortal Soul: who is very solicitous to prevent small and temporal inconveniences, but takes no care to escape the damnation of Hell.

Is he a wise man, as to his temporal *Estate*, that layes designs onely for a day, without any prospect to or provision for the remaining part of his life? Just thus does he that provides for the *short time* of this life, but takes no care for all *Eternity*; which is to be wise for a moment, but a fool for ever, and to act as untowardly and as crossly to the reason of things as can be imagined; to regard *Time* as if it were *Eternity*, and to neglect *Eternity* as if it were but a *short time*.

Do you think him a wise man, who is serious about trifles, but trifles about the most serious matters? Just so is he who pursues the World and the petty interests of it with all his might, but minds Religion and the weighty concernments of *Eternity* as if he minded them not.

Do you count him a wise man, who throws himself over-board to save his goods? Just so doth he who to secure any thing in this world makes ship-wreck of his Conscience, and casts away his Soul.

Is he wise, who is wise in any thing but in his proper *profession* and *employment*? wise for every body but himself? who is ingenious to contrive his own misery, and to do himself a mischief; but is dull and stupid as to the designing of any real benefit and advantage to himself? Just such a one is he who is a good *Trade-man*, but a bad Christian; for Christianity is more our proper *Calling* and profession then the very *Trades* we live upon; and just such is every Sinner, who is wise to do evil, but to do good hath no understanding.

Is he wise, who neglects and disobliges him who is his best friend, and can be his shrewdest *Enemy*? who with one weak *Troop* goes out to meet him that comes against him with *thousands of thousands*? who flies a small danger, and runs upon a greater? Just so does every wicked man who neglects and contemns God, who can save or destroy him; who strives with his *Maker*, and provoketh the *Lord* to *jealousie*; and with the small and inconsiderable *Forces of a Man* takes the Field against the mighty *God the Lord of Hosts*; who fears them that can kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do; but fears not him who after he hath kill'd can destroy both body and soul in Hell; and just such is he who for fear of any thing in this world ventures to grieve God, for in so doing he runs away from men, and falls into the hands of the living God; he flies from a temporal danger, and leaps into Hell.

Is he wise, who in matters of greatest moment and concernment neglects opportunities never to be retriv'd: who standing upon the *Shore*, and seeing the *Tide* making haste towards him apace, and that he hath but a few minutes to save himself, yet will lay himself to sleep there, till the *cruel Sea* rush in upon him, and overwhelm him? Just so does he who trifles away this day of Gods grace and patience, and foolishly adjourns the work of Repentance and the business of Religion to a dying hour.

And, to put an end to these Questions, Is he wise, who hopes to attain the end without the means? nay, by means that are quite contrary to the end? Just such is every wicked man who hopes to be

happy hereafter without holiness here; to gain the favour of God by offending him, and to come to the sight of him by sinning against him; and to be blessed. (that is) to find a pleasure in the enjoyment of God, and in the company of holy Spirits, by rendring himself as unsuitable and unlike to them as he can.

use II.i

The second Use is to perswade men to be throughly and seriously Religious, as ever they would acquit themselves to be truly knowing and wise. Knowledge and Wisdom are confessed Excellencies among men, Eccl. 2. 13. *Wisdom excels Folly as much as light doth darkness.* There are some Virtues and perfections that gain affection from men, as Truth, and Meekness, and Kindness; but there are others that cause admiration and raise wonder, among these are Knowledge and Wisdom, which if they be in any eminent degree, will cast a great lustre and glory upon a man, Eccl. 8. 1. *The Wisdom of a man maketh his face to shine.* Now even the shadows of these latter sort of Excellencies hit the vain-glorious nature of man more then the realities of the former, because *proud Man had rather be admir'd then low'd.* And that Knowledge and Wisdom are generally acknowledged to be great Excellencies, appears, because men do so generally affect the reputation of Knowledge, and are so ambitious to be accounted Wise. There is not any thing that men value themselves more upon then their Knowledge and Discretion: and on the contrary, Ignorance and Folly are reckoned among the greatest defects of humane nature, so that

that they are accounted generally a greater reproach and disgrace to a man then *Vice* and *Wickedness*; and they have got so ill a report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted *Knaves* then *Fools*; hence it is that men generally pretend to these Excellencies of Knowledge and Wisdom, even such as are most destitute of them, and rather then want these Perfections, they will call even their Vices and Imperfections by this name: *Craft*, and *Silence*, and *Secrecie*, and *Reservedness*, and *Formality*, and *affected Gravity*, all these put in for the Title of *Wisdom*; so ambitious is the nature of man of the reputation of this Excellency.

Job 11. 12. Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild asses colt. Now this very thing that men are so forward to counterfeit these perfections is an Argument of the Excellency of real Knowledge and Wisdom; for (as I said before) to counterfeit is nothing else but to put on the appearance of some real Excellency; common and ordinary things are not counterfeited, but onely things of price and value; as *Gold*, and *Silver*, and *precious Stones*; And that men are so tenacious of these Excellencies, so loth to be stripp'd even of the shadow and appearance of them, is an argument that men highly esteem them. So that it seems that these Excellencies are in great dearness among men, because we hold them so fast, that when we cannot possess the reality of them, yet we love to enjoy the opinion of them, and rather then be wholly disseised of them, will hold them by that sleight and fantastick tenure of *Imagination*.

Now if we account them such excellencies, we should labour to be possest of them in truth and reality, and not take up with any counterfeits of them, but use such a care and niceness about them as men do about *Jewels*, and *precious stones*, which because they are of great value, all mistakes about them are shameful and intollerable. I have shewed that Religion is the truest knowledg, and most real wisdom, therefore every man that values his understanding, and stands upon the reputation of his prudence and discretion, ought to be religious, Deut. 4.6. *Keep therefore my Statutes, for this is your wisdom & understanding in the sight of the nations.* Those who understand and know how to manage the petty interests of this world, we account them shrewd, and cunning, and designing men; but if we would speak truly and wisely of things, the Religious man is the notable man; he that contrives to be everlastingly happy, and lays designs for all Eternity, he is a man of the deepest reach; he that takes care of his Soul, and secures his Eternal interest, he is a shrewd man. That man who by the assistance of Gods grace can over-reach his own deceitful heart, and defeat all the arts and wiles of the Devil, and escape those pollutions that are in the world, and save himself from the sins, and snares, and temptations of an untoward Generation, he is a cunning man indeed. Woudst thou then be truly knowing? labour to know God, and thy self, thy interest, and thy end, and thy happiness, and the way of attaining it. Woudst thou be truly wise? be wise for thy self, wise for thy Soul, wise for Eternity; Resolve upon a Religious course of life;

Fear God and depart from evil; look beyond things present and sensible, unto things which are not seen, and are eternal; labour to secure the great interests of another world, and refer all the actions of this short and dying life, to that state which will shortly begin, but never have an end; and this will approve it self to be *Wisdom* at the last, whatever the world judg of it now; for, not that which is approved of men *now*, but what shall *finally* be approved by God, is true wisdom; that which is esteemed so by him who is the *fountain* and *original* of all wisdom, the first *rule and measure* of it, the best and most competent *Judge* of it.

I deny not but many that are wicked, and neglect Religion, may think themselves wise, and enjoy their delusion for a while, but there is a time a coming, when the most profane and Atheistical, who ~~now account themselves witty, and~~ *and* ~~knowing~~ *and* ~~understanding~~ *and* ~~argument~~ *of* ~~a~~ *great spirit*, and a more then common ~~wit~~ *and* ~~understanding~~ *to* slight God, and baffle Religion, and to level all the discourses of another world, with the the *Poetical descriptions* of the *Fairy Land*: I say, there is a day a coming, when all these witty fools shall be unhappily undeceived, and not being able to enjoy their delusion any longer, shall call themselves fools for ever.

But why do I use arguments to perswade men to that which is so *excellent*, so *useful*, and so *necessary*? The thing it self I am pressing you to, hath allurements in it beyond all arguments: For, if Religion be the best knowledg and wisdom, I cannot offer any thing beyond this to your understandings.

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to raise your esteem of it; I can present nothing beyond this to your Affections that may be attractive of your love and desire. All that can be done, is to set the thing before men, and to offer it to their choice; and if mens natural desire of wisdom, and knowledg, and happiness will not perswade them to be Religious, 'tis in vain to use arguments: if the sight of these beauties will not charm mens affections, 'tis to no purpose to compel a liking, and to urge and push forward a *match*, to the making whereof *consent* is necessary. Religion is a matter of our freest choise; and if men will obstinately and wilfully set themselves against it, there is no remedy, *Pertinacia nullum remedium posuit Deus*; If men will choose to be fools, and to be miserable, all that can be said is this, God will leave such persons to inherit their own choice, to enjoy the portion of sinners; ~~and much good it may do them~~. and much good ~~it~~ may it do them but I am sure it will not.

F I N I S.